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ABSTRACT

This report discusses an interview study that examined the thinking about adult learning of major decision makers, staff development practitioners, and influencial researchers. Brief descriptions are presented of assumptions inferred from the interview data: (1) adult learning experiences are envisioned as potentially similar for all individuals; (2) designs for adult learning through staff development are based upon the learning styles of the participants; (3) if an activity or experience cannot be assigned meaning, learning does not occur; (4) meaning is established by the interaction of experience and purpose; (5) experience must be processed through self-reflection, analysis and critique; (6) the creation and resolution of cognitive dissonance is a critical element in learning; (7) learners recognize cognitive dissonance; (8) significant learning results in transformation of the self; (9) the emerging self and learning are synergistically related; (10) relationships are important in the emergence of the self; (11) learning is a process of emancipation; (12) learning is a self-directing process; (13) adult development is not automatic, but is a function of emancipation, purpose and self-critique; (14) how adults learn, derive meaning, identify interests, and find purpose is not considered developmental; and (15) language development and thought are interrelatd and important to self-direction. These findings are translated into recommendations that can alter how teachers are trained and receive inservice programs. (JD)

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ADULT LEARNING, TEACHER PREPARATION AND INSERVICE: AN URGENT AGENDA

by

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A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, March, 1985

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ADULT LEARNING , TEACHER PREPARATION AND INSERVICE: AN URGENT AGENDA

Our schools have been notoriously unsuccessful in meeting the challenge of a new educational era. These shortcomings have recently been brought into sharp national focus (Goodlad, 1983; Sizer, 1983; Commission on Education, 1983). Teacher preparation and training is receiving its share of the attention, as further evidenced by the discussion on the national agenda for teacher education for the 1980s at AERA in 1984 (Morine-Dershimer and Griffin). Yet teachers continue to enter the system with archaic notions of what it is to be a teacher. Their expectations still include that of survival on their own with little help; that learning, if it continues, will be a singular journey; that the schools will do little to challenge them to higher cognitive functioning. The patterns of interaction that are typical in schools at all levels reinforce the old notions.

In parallel play with traditional modes of thought there has been a recent evolution in the fields of teacher preparation and inservice that has been characterized by research , lively discussion and a re-examination of the fundamental assumptions about teaching. This paper is another step in translating this refreshing dialogue and exciting research into practice.

Assuming that it is desirable to do so, what is the most promising research base for changing beliefs about what it is to be a teacher? This research, if it is successfully translated, should alter how schools of higher education and K-12 settings train teachers and cause them to view their roles. That is the task of this paper: to translate the findings

in a major study on adult learning into recommendations that can alter how we prepare and continue to train teachers through the content we offer and the interaction patterns that provide the context for delivery. The result can be new perceptions about teaching and the teacher's own learning.

THE STUDY

The study is entitled "A Critical Analysis of the Assumptions Held by Policy Makers, Researchers and Staff Developers about Adult Learning." This interview study examined the thinking about adult learning of major decision makers, staff development practitioners and influential researchers such as John Goodlad, Elliott Eisner, Bruce Joyce, Ralph Tyler, Madeline Hunter, John Vasconcellos, Jane Stallings, Wilson Riles, Paul Berman and Gary Hart. The assumptions about adult learning held by the 28 participants in this study were determined through extensive personal interviews with individuals selected by criteria related to their action in the field. The interviews were framed to reveal the layers of thinking underlying their assumptions regarding adult learning (see attached interview schedule). Participants were asked to reflect upon their own thinking, thereby providing an opportunity for negotiated analysis through discussion and collaboration. The interview data were interpreted from two major perspectives. The first perspective was a critical analysis of the participant's current thinking on adult learning as viewed through the dimensions of differentiation, meaning, cognitive dissonance, self, developmental patterns and culture. The second major perspective was the analysis of language and metaphor that interact to form assumptions.

THE FINDINGS

Fifteen assumptions were inferred from the interview data. Each assumption formed a dimension of learning that describes learning as experienced by the participants. It is critical to note that participants projected their own assumptions about learning onto others. This is not to say that they did not differentiate themselves from others, but that they thought that others were capable of experiencing learning similarly.

The assumptions, and a brief description,*are:

1. Adult learning experiences are envisioned as potentially similar for all individuals.

   The participants described outstanding learning experiences in terms of growth, and as being synergistic and emancipatory in its process. The language of metaphor suggested that unity of perspective. The chart of Shared Metaphorical Entailments (Chart 1) provides a visualization of this common understanding. The inner circle includes meanings common to all metaphors.

2. Designs for adult learning through staff development are based upon the learning styles of the designer (participant).

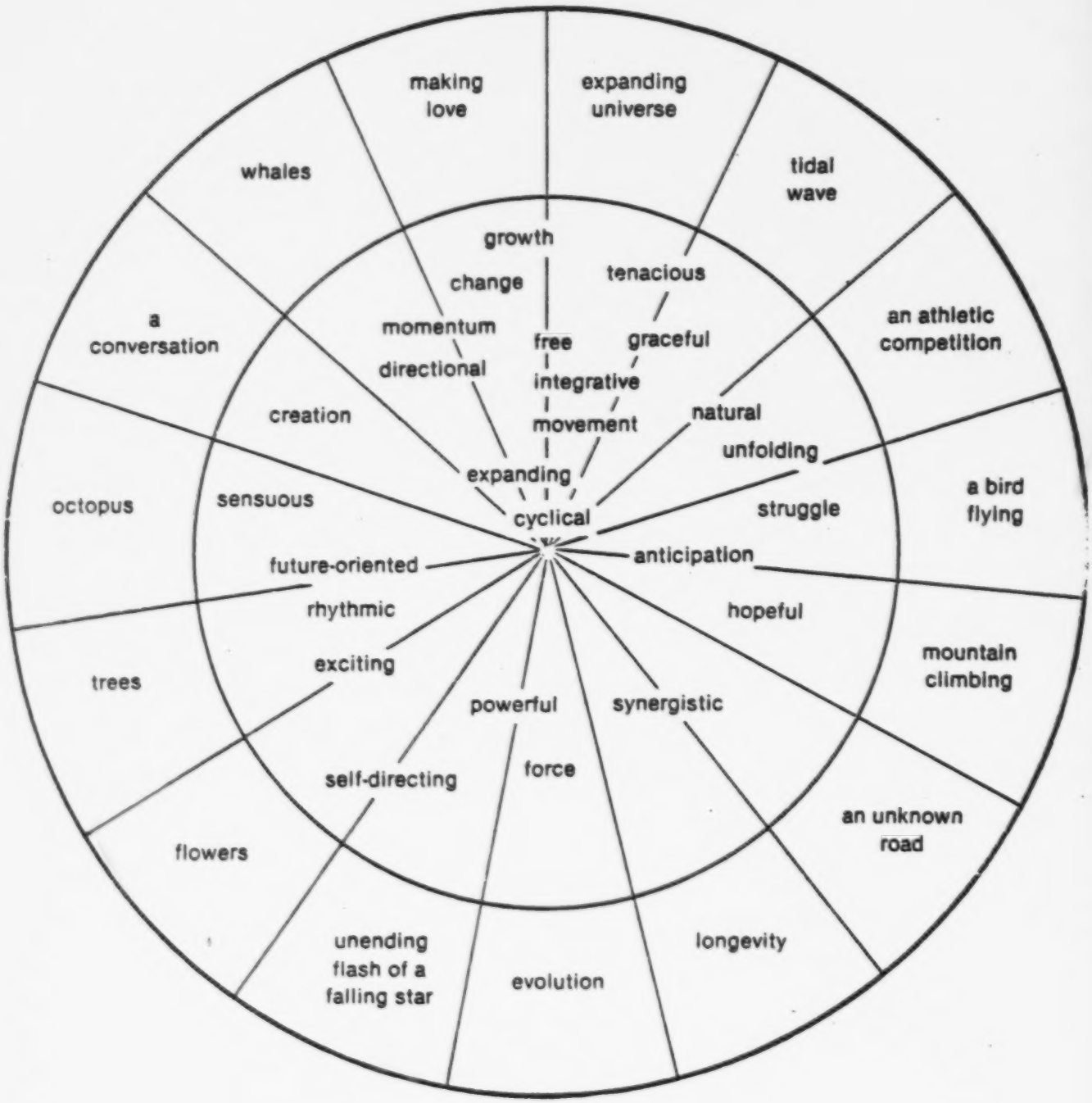
   The learning styles of the participants was the primary force that determined their actions in the field of staff development. The primary style differences lay in the following areas: 1) sequential, modular learner vs. the holistic learner, 2) observational learner vs. the experiential learner, 3) rational, logical learner vs. the intuitive learner.

3. If an activity or experience cannot be assigned meaning, learning does not occur.

*for a full description of the findings, see "How Adults Learn: An Interview Study of Leading Researchers, Policy Makers and Staff Developers," (Lambert, 1984).

CHART I

SHARED METAPHORICAL ENTAILMENTS



4. Meaning is established by the interaction of experience and purpose.

Meaning is not seen as an intrinsic property; it is assigned by the actor in unison with the completion of a pattern, picture or gestalt. The assignment of meaning to an event or circumstance was an interaction of experience and purpose. People are meaning makers.

5. Experience must be processed through self-reflection, analysis and critique.

The participants viewed experience as being molded, weighted, evaluated by the processes of self-reflection, analysis and critique. They saw it as yielding mounting readiness for increasingly complex experience, increased skill and wisdom. These retrospective processes were used as a means of identifying discrepancies and lodging argument and internal dialogue with oneself.

6. The creation and resolution of cognitive dissonance is a critical element in learning.

7. Learners see cognitive dissonance.

"Cognitive dissonance" is used to mean a state of disequilibrium resulting from a discrepant event, experience or idea that is in variance with the current understandings or images held by an individual. The drive for equilibrium is a temporary state, with the moment of consonance being accompanied by satisfaction or elation. However, the continuation of consonance creates restlessness and dissatisfaction, so that dissonance is sought of self-induced. Their own tools for retrospection and thinking assisted them in both the creation and resolution of dissonance.

8. Significant learning results in the transformation of the self.

9. The emerging self and learning are synergistically related.

10. Relationships are important in the emergence of the self.

11. Learning is a process of emancipation.

12. Learning is a self-directing process.

Transformation is not just adding to what you already are. Such change is not adding on to an internal structure or map, but actually altering the self. It is being different.

The process of emancipation was frequently a dimension of relationships, especially mentoring ones ("He set me free!"). Validation, challenge, support critique were all forms of feedback found in relationships and used in defining the self.

The participants find survival value in learning. Learning is equated with living, one is of little use without the other.

The orchestration of learning and transformation was a self-directing process. Experiences and relationships were aggressively sought, evaluated, discarded or embraced.

As the metaphors also suggested, learning is directional, purposeful, but without a narrowly defined route.

13. Adult development is not automatic, but is a function of emancipation, purpose and self-critique.

14. How adults learn, derive meaning, identify interests, and find purpose is not considered developmental.

The findings support the notion that learning is viewed as directional, propelled by purpose, pleasure, an inner drive that parallels Maslow's "actualizing" process. Growth is not automatic,

but a function of self-critique, analysis, reflection. If these processes are in place, then as one matures,

- interaction with the environment is increasingly complex, yet refined;
- understanding of one's own learning increases;
- knowledge of and confidence in one's own abilities;
- there is growing commitment to values and ideas.

There is no support in these data to indicate that the following factors are developmental:

- how we learn
- primary learning interests (as different from situational interests)
- purpose
- how we derive meaning (as different from what is meaningful).

15. Language development and thought are interrelated and important to self-direction.

One of the most intriguing of the serendipitous findings in this study is the role of English teachers in the learning of participants from minority cultures. Four of the five minorities in the study stated that their high school or college English teacher was instrumental in helping them to use language as a medium of thought and learning. The modeling provided by these teachers, the audacity to think that thought and power resides within* and the use of language in thought were all contributing

*One Hispanic participant commented,"For someone in my culture to gain the audacity to believe that they can think and use knowledge to solve problems is unusual."

factors in the understanding of this phenomenon.

It would appear that the role of mentors, and emancipation through those relationships, are more important to minorities and to women in this study than to Caucasian men. Not surprisingly, as the cultural imperative for women has historically been similar to that experienced in minority cultures.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

If educators are going to function as learners in the workplace, universities must assume a larger share of the responsibility toward that end. Pre-service, as well as continuing service, needs to be transformed, as least redesigned, to respond to what is now known about adult learning, improving schools and staff development. Within the next five years, the turnover in the teaching and administrative staffs will be substantial. This will mean that the work of universities with new staff will soon be felt more keenly than it has been for several years. Now is the time for that influence to be thoughtfully considered and updated.

The university needs to take a leading role in changing what it means to be a teacher. This is a large order. Clearly, the models of early teachers and the cultural norm for teaching has a tremendous influence upon the individuals who choose to enter the teaching field. In fact, as Lortie (1975) has pointed out, those norms may well account for the major reasons that individuals enter the field at all. Therefore, universities need to reduce the ease of entry into the profession. It is difficult to defend universities who grant teaching credentials to those who are less than able. If the higher education community

could reach consensus on expectations, some of the screening would take care of itself.

The findings in adult learning point to recommendations for preservice and inservice education that can make an important contribution toward shifting the norms of teaching. Those recommendations follow:

1. Teachers must understand themselves as adult learners and continually function as adult learners in the workplace.

The fifteen assumptions in this study are among the important understandings that teachers must have about themselves. It is essential to understand that how you learn is how you teach. Therefore, teachers must know how they learn and how to broaden their teaching repertoire in order to teach those children with different learning styles.

Further, and much more complicated an endeavor, teachers must know how to use their own cognitive processes, relationships and environment to derive cognitive dissonance (and consonance), meaning, self-knowledge, feedback and opportunities for self-direction. These skills must be taught and practiced in preservice and continued in inservice. Recommendation 5 addresses the "how to" of such a preservice program.

Data created and generated from the teaching environment can be used to assist in the development of adult learning processes: construction and assignment of meaning; cognitive dissonance; continual reconceptualization of the role of the teacher and the self as a teacher; self-reflection, critique and direction. Such a search for knowledge and understandings necessitates a particular stance toward innovation, research and analysis, processes which must be part of the regular life of a teacher. This embracing "stance" can be taught and practiced in preservice, as well as in inservice through the following strategies:

- the creation, study and implementation of innovations
- action research, particularly ethnographic research
- acquisition and use of research on teaching and learning
- collaborative research between universities and schools
- analysis of teaching decisions and strategies
- formative and summative evaluation
- self-assessment and reflection
- peer observation , feedback and dialogue

The above strategies deny complacency and routine and insure intellectual aliveness, wonder and challenge. They embody the curriculum of adult learning by their challenge to think in new ways. They are too often absent or avoided in the work of the teacher. The role of collegiality and mentoring will be addressed in the next two recommendations.

2. Teachers must understand teaching as the practice of collegiality.

One of the most inhibiting norms about teaching is that of isolation...expected, sought and inevitably found. The organizational structure of schools (periods, bells, architecture, segmented curriculum) make isolation easy to maintain and difficult to change. Yet change it must. But how?

Peer feedback and critique are essential to continued learning. Pre-service programs should require peer observation and feedback as a central part of the training. Professors must model collegiality within the university setting. Seminars must be designed to process feedback and dialogue. Further, critical discourse must explore such questions as "How is meaning derived from schools, for learners of all ages?" "How do we negotiate theory and practice in the workplace?" "How do I continually

identify resources to foster my own learning?" Such discourse can foster heuristic practice and thought among individuals , as well as singularly.

No fewer than two teaching interns should be placed in the same schools where peer interaction is required. Schools must pair new and veteran teachers and structure interaction time (and sometimes agendas, while people are "learning" to talk to each other). This interaction must include observation of each other's teaching, time for feedback, problem-posing and solving, inquiry, action research and planning. Eventually, these interaction demands, and the satisfaction derived from them, may result in new demands on the organizational structures of schools.

3. Teachers need mentors.

Mentoring is a unique type of relationship that includes the benefits of collegiality outlined in Recommendation 2. However, because of its intense personal and short-term tenure,it has some features that are specific to that kind of interaction. For some, being a mentor seems to evolve naturally. For others--many university advisors and veteran teachers--it is a set of skills that can be learned. Chart II outlines the skills of mentoring in reference to adult learning. Further, student teachers and regular teachers need to understand their responsibility in identifying mentors, nurturing the relationship and upholding their reciprocal obligation to mutual learning. Both need to know when to let go.

As in the case of peer interaction, mentoring needs to be built into the fabric of preservice and inservice. In California, Senate Bill 813 (1983) has established a Mentor Teacher program that seems to hold great promise, as yet unrealized.

CHART II

Skills of Mentoring	Essential Elements of Adult Learning
• orchestrate cognitive dissonance and consonance through such approaches as questioning, feedback and coaching	cognitive dissonance/ consonance
• provide solid experience as a context for examining ideas and actions	experience
• demonstrate strong commitment to personal growth and development include continued learning, self-reflection, analysis and critique	purpose, self-analysis
• demonstrate flexible learning style with skills in convergent and divergent thinking	varied learning style
• foster self-direction in others by encouraging independece and self-analysis	self-direction, emancipation
• understand the stages of a mentoring relationship, altering the interaction in response to growing autonomy	autonomy, adult development
• demonstrate flexibility by knowing when to be a teacher, facilitator, listener, inquirer	cognitive dissonance/ consonance, support
• demonstrate skills as an action researcher	inquiry, dissonance
• understands persuasion, facilitation and change processes	all elements
• serve as a model adult learner	all elements
• demonstrate strong collegial skills - including critique, support and reciprocity	collegiality
• understand and communicate knowledge of effective teaching	technical assistance, modeling, cognitive dissonance/consonance
• evidence capacity for mutual trust and regard	trust, regard

4. Teachers must be immersed in the ecology of schools.

It is the school environment from which teachers generate dissonance, meaning, relationships, feedback. That environment is an expression of the norms of teaching, the culture of the school. Teachers must be able to shape and reshape that environment to respond to their needs as adult learners, toppling the equilibrium that maintains the status quo.

University supervisors who park their cars and walk directly to room 10 and out again model the poorest in thinking about what it is to be a member of a school community. Student teachers must be required to audit or join in staff meetings, support groups, peer observation teams, advisory committees and problem solving groups. Teachers must continue to be partially evaluated on the professional involvement in the schools. To be a teacher is to be a member of a social community.

5. The Pre-Service program must be in phases that includes the university laboratory school.

It seems unlikely that adequate school settings can be found that will provide the type of environments needed to nourish and practice some of the more critical elements of adult learning. Nor that we should relegate to most schools the "tender young learners" that are learning to practice dissonance, reflection, self-direction, critical dialogue, and meaning construction. So what is to be done? How can these exquisite skills be developed in environments that are "safe" enough for error and growth?

Part of the answer, or an answer, is the re-establishment of the university laboratory school. As part of an overall teacher training program, such an environment can serve as an intermediate "petrie dish".... protected ,yet stimulating to growth, demanding of growth.

An overall program that allowed for the evolution of adult learning skills and understandings could look like this:

Phase I- Limited coursework, including theory and practice in a seminar setting. (The processes would be those of adult learning; the content, the other work of teaching.)

Phase II- Teaching and learning in a laboratory school, with extensive support from the lab school staff, peers and university mentors.

Phase III- Practice teaching in an actual school setting, with extensive support from a fellow candidate in a peer observation relationship, and from the university mentor and the school staff.

Phase IV- Intern teaching with heavy training and support.

Phase V- Work as a teacher. By now the teacher should be powerful enough as a learner to lead and influence other teachers and the school environment, to seek out peer support systems and to be a practicing inquirer.

Phase VI- Career ladder opportunities within the profession so that teachers can aspire for greater challenges and rewards without leaving the classroom.

6. Teachers need to re-examine and dispel the myths of teaching.

"Changing what it is to be a teacher," means just that. If one is a practicing adult learner, emancipated and self-directing, the myth of equity in the profession seems ludicrous. Learning, by its very nature, means uniqueness and unevenness. Isolation will seem as foreign to learning as not reading, or not inquiring. Resistence to change will mean resistence to thought and growth. Fifty minute periods, punctuated by bells, will be an intolerable way to govern learning (as may three months off in the summer). One-way learning with students which denies the reciprocity of any relationship will once again be questioned, perhaps successfully this time. Myths die hard. However, they die with more

finality when they no longer make sense in the light of a new critical consciousness. Such a consciousness can be born from knowledge and understanding of adult learning.

CONCLUSION

Adult development is not automatic. It is a function of reflection, critique and self-direction. If these skills are not practiced in the workplace, stagnation, resistance and "burn out" will undoubtedly occur. The profession has some choices to make. These choices will not be made for us by the reform movements, test scores, legislative intent or even public outcry. These pressures will not help with the choices because the questions are the wrong ones. Therefore, the answers are antithetical to the needed solutions.

The behaviors that are necessary if schools are to continually improve and, yes, if student achievement is going to rise, are the behaviors of a consummate adult learner. There are indications that individuals who are continuing learners interact with their environments in increasingly complex, yet refined ways; understand their own learning; have growing confidence in their own abilities, as well as growing committment to values and ideas. Such a teacher will promote similar qualities in students. The central question for teacher preparation and inservice then becomes: how do we assist in the development of autonomous adult learners? This paper suggests a few answers. The choices of the profession constitute an urgent agenda.

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Instrumentation

Interview Questions

1. Think about a decision that you've made regarding a staff development program that you were pleased with. What did you think about as you considered the decision? What was that process like? What was the program like?

2. You have been doing a lot of thinking lately about _____. If you were to design a program for your staff in _____, how would you go about that? What would be your initial considerations? How would you determine what was most important to learn? (In another position you've held, tell me how you would design this staff development?)

3. Reflect on one of the best learning experiences that you've had. Talk about it.

4. Are there ways in which you would describe yourself as a typical learner? How are you unusual?

5. If you want to convince a respected opponent of your point of view, how would you plan your approach (set the stage to win)? What clues might you pick up from that person when you think they are being persuaded? What would make the other person want to be persuaded?

6. Think of someone who regards you as a mentor. Talk about the last time you were together. How would you describe those interactions? Do you have a mentor? What is that relationship like?

7. You have been in your current position for _____. How has the job changed or taken form since you have had it? What has caused it to change? . . . you, the environment, politics, resources? What will you leave as a legacy?

8. I've tried to find out how you learn and how you think others learn. Could you capture that process for me? I'm going to give us each a few minutes to reflect on our conversation. (time) Can you think of any metaphors that would describe it?